

## Strong Work Habits for Confident, Successful Learners

For most of our students, the quarterly report card is an affirmation of the hard work that they have been doing for the past nine weeks at school. Any report card on which all of the effort and behavior marks are *Excellent* or *Good* is a fine report card. We have told students that we expect every one of them to earn grades of *Excellent* or *Good* for Effort and Behavior in every subject.

The Mansfield Board of Education has established the goal of making *all* Mansfield students confident learners. We know that most students who routinely complete their assignments and put effort into their work meet this goal. We have found that students' performance on the Connecticut Mastery Test is highly consistent with the confidence they demonstrate in their classes.

Our challenge is to find ways to get *every one* of our students to achieve at a high level of confidence. We have noticed that many of our students who do not score at the state goal on the mastery test are ones who do not complete their assignments. We pay particular attention each year to the work habits of students who have not met the state goal in reading, writing and math.

The Behavior and Effort marks reflect your child's approach to school work. Teaching middle school students to complete their assignments with care is probably the most crucial academic habit that we can instill. Typically, over 250 of our 600 students take home a report card with **ten or more grades of *Excellent*** in Effort and Behavior. We pay special recognition to these students each quarter by awarding a commendation letter from Mrs. Morell and me. The letters will be awarded within the next two weeks; it takes us a while to sign and fold so many letters!

Any Effort grade lower than *Good* is cause for concern. While *effort* may seem difficult to assess, teachers are looking primarily at assignment completion as they assign an Effort grade. Is the work completed? Is it completed with the thoroughness and care that we expect at this grade level? What if the report card in front of you includes an Effort or Behavior grade of *Fair*, *Marginal*, or *Unsatisfactory*? Those marks indicate that there is room for improvement.

Knowing students this age – and particularly students who have not been working as hard as they should at school – it will be important to **review and discuss progress on these goals at least once a week**. Each marking period is approximately nine weeks long, and it will take frequent reminders to keep the goal in sight for such a long time.

Unfortunately, students often confuse talent and work. Many students believe that grades are awarded for talent, rather than for hard, careful work. If you hear this, you may assure your child that students with high grades are submitting excellent work that took time and effort to complete. It is important to help children at this age to understand that their decisions about how hard they work on assignments is the major factor in the grades that they receive.

We provide many kinds of support for students who need some help with organizing and completing their work. Each teacher is available four days a week during X-Block. We offer Homework Help as part of our After-School Program. Teachers make parents aware of assignments due by posting them on the Homework Hotline (extension numbers for each teacher are listed in the MMS Calendar / Handbook) or on their webpages at [www.mmsnet.org](http://www.mmsnet.org). Please call your child's counselor (Mrs. Després for Gr. 5-6, Miss Kyriacou for Gr. 7-8) to discuss additional options that might be appropriate for your child.

On Monday, November 19<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday, November 20<sup>th</sup> teachers will be conferring with parents about students' progress. Included in this packet is a letter from the school counselors explaining how to participate in a conference with your child's teachers.

If you have any questions or concerns about this topic or others, please contact me at [cryanj@mansfieldct.org](mailto:cryanj@mansfieldct.org) or 429-9341.

Sincerely,  
*Jeff Cryan*